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Confidence Hypothesis about Efficiency of Specific Strategies (CHESS): A Novel Parameter and its Possible Significance in Applications

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Abstract

In this paper a novel term is introduced to cover for a parameter already investigated in a number of experiments conducted in the Democritus University, without, yet, being identified with a specific name. The aim of all those studies was to investigate the learning strategies frequency of use in correlation with the confidence of the subjects as to whether and to what extent such strategies enhance their language learning. In the specific experiment forty eight students from the first three grades in a State Secondary school, in Thrace, Greece, were recruited through convenience sampling, twenty four Greek native speakers and twenty four Turkish native speakers with Greek as their second language. There were sixteen learners out of each grade, eight of low and eight of high level in English, four male, four female, forty eight learners altogether, twenty four male and twenty four female students. The students had to indicate not only the level of frequency of strategy use but also their confidence in those strategies' effectiveness; this is the introduced term Confidence Hypothesis about Efficiency of Specific Strategies (CHESS). Furthermore, the students used the *Vougiouklis & Vougiouklis bar* (2008) instead of the

widely used Likert scale for the filling in of the questionnaires minimizing time and effort. The questionnaire used was the translated in Greek and validated SILL questionnaire with 50 items. Each of the 50 questions was followed by two bars: on the first bar the students had to specify the frequency of use of each strategy and on the second their confidence about each strategy's effectiveness.

The data is still processed.

Keywords: Questionnaires, SILL, strategies, Likert, Vougiouklis & Vougiouklis bar, CHESS.

1. Introduction

Research on Language learning strategies (LLS) provides strong evidence that strategies actually facilitate language learning [2], [19], [20], [22]. There has also been convincing evidence that language learning strategies can and should be taught [1], [4]. Nevertheless, things are not straight forward as strategic use depends on various factors, including learners' age, target language proficiency, and socio-cultural context [25]. Moreover, discrepancies between studies may derive from differences regarding the methodological tools selection.

2. Research review

2.1 LLS research in Greece

In our review we focus on learners whose Mother Tongue (MT) is Greek and Target Language (TL) English.

Kambakis-Vougiouklis (2008) [12], investigating Muslim /Turkish MT and Greek as a Second Language students learning English as a foreign language, found that females were better at guessing but less confident concerning the effectiveness of the strategy while boys seemed to be less accurate with their guesses but more confident. Psaltou-Joycey (2008) [23], mainly focused on the effect of factors such as age, proficiency and cultural background of university students learning Greek as a second language while Gavriilidou & Psaltou-Joycey (2009) [7], shed light on issues such as the definition of strategies, ways of recording them, strategies employed by effective learners, factors that influence the choice of strategies and the teaching of strategies. Moreover, Gavriilidou & Papanis (2010) [6], investigated the effectiveness of direct strategy teaching with suggested activities for Muslim students and Psaltou-Joycey & Kantaridou (2009) [24], worked with multilingualism in relation to the use of learning strategies as well as learning styles.

Overall, the majority of researchers conclude that strategies that are most frequently used by the proficient learners are mostly cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies [3], [8]. There have been instances of strategy use by less

proficient students, not consciously, but in a random way [5]. However, in higher proficiency students there could be recorded use of learning strategies in an automated manner, not consciously, yet in these cases the need for strategy use has been encoded as a way of successful learning.

2.2 Confidence Hypothesis about Effectiveness of Specific Strategies: CHES

Confidence factor in the process of language learning has been primarily investigated in association with communication strategies by Kambaki-Vougioukli (1992) [10], [11], by Intze & Kambaki (2009) [9], among Turkish MT and Greek MT learners, and Mathioudakis & Kambaki-Vougioukli (2010) [18], among university students.

In a series of studies Kambakis-Vougiouklis [13], [14], and Vougiouklis & Kambaki-Vougioukli [26], included confidence along with frequency in the SILL questionnaire, namely, the learners were asked to specify not only how frequently they used each strategy but also how confident they felt of its effectiveness. Results from these studies indicate that when the learners claim they use a strategy, this does not necessarily imply that they also consider it effective as evidenced by low confidence scores in strategies they claimed they use very often. Also, conversely, there were cases where learners claimed they did not use a strategy but nevertheless seemed confident that this strategy would really help them in language learning. The researchers' interpreted this as a plea on the part of the learners to receive instruction on how to employ learning strategies in their study. If, on the other hand, there is lower confidence than the actual frequency, it was assumed that the learners might use this strategy as a routine, not really appreciating it. In either case instruction is necessary before considering different action, such as excluding some strategies for the specific learners.

Petrogiannis & Gavriilidou (2015) [21], produced a translated in Greek, validated, concise version of SILL especially for younger learners, yet, they do not take their learners' confidence as far as confidence in each strategy's effectiveness is concerned. However, this is the tool that will be used in present experiment.

Trying to investigate the confidence factor more widely and with different populations, in a series of orally administered SILL questionnaire Kambaki-Vougioukli et al (2011) [16], and Kambakis-Vougiouklis & Mamoukari (2016) [17], identified a probable need for strategy instruction. This is probably because the bilingual, Turkish/Greek learners, who participated in a research investigating both the frequency of use of L.L.S. and confidence, scored higher in confidence, though their scores in frequency of strategy use indicated that they rarely employed the particular strategy. Of course there were few cases of

students; scoring lower confidence and higher frequency, probably due to either lack of the ‘know how’ or just routine.

Taking all this into account, we thought this issue might arouse other researchers’ interest and it needs a name to be referred to. An acronym perhaps, would make it easier to use and remember. Thus, the term CHESS was coined in order to associate it with strategic play, as it concerns the most characteristic strategic game, i.e. chess. Needless to say, the term does not concern only SILL but any other questionnaire that has to do with confidence in somebody’s strategic decision.

2.3 An alternative statistical tool: the [01] bar

Likert scales are the most widely used statistical tool in every piece of research worldwide. However, the application of language tests, including SILL, to less sophisticated groups such as Muslim, Turkish speaking learners revealed certain drawbacks of the specific method the most prominent being the difficulty to make semantic refinements such as the difference between *generally not true of me* and *somewhat true of me*, or *seldom* and *almost never*.

In order to provide some remedy for such as condition, Vougiouklis & Vougiouklis (2008) [15], suggested the use of a **bar** [01], based on fuzzy theory introduced by Zadeh (1965) [27].

0 ————— 1

The far left end 0 represents the completely negative answer/attitude and 1 the completely positive answer/attitude. What is required from the participants is to simply cut the bar at any point -actually infinite- they think that expresses their attitude towards any item, the specific moment. That is to say, their answers are not affected by their linguistic knowledge, as they are mostly required to “feel” their position on the bar, rather than consciously think of the wording or any suggested division pre-arranged for them. Replacing the Likert scales by a fuzzy one, may probably facilitate the task of filling in questionnaires constructed in languages other than the learners’ MT, minimizing in this way possible danger of misunderstanding due to insufficient linguistic knowledge, which may distort the validity of the questionnaire. Moreover, at the results processing stage, when using a Likert scale, researchers must decide in advance how many divisions will be used. By contrast, the employment of the bar does not require such an initially predetermined decision, giving space to multiprocessing potential.

2.4 Purpose and rationale of present study

The main target of the present study is to investigate through the use of the SILL questionnaire, whether the subjects interviewed make use of certain

learning strategies and s answer on their computer screen, the use of the **Vougiouklis & Vougiouklis bar** is employed, and the parameter of confidence is initiated. The students are asked whether they feel confident that each of the learning strategies actually help them and to what extend. In order to achieve that, the SILL questionnaire is implemented in an electronic form. The investigation is carried out through a computer where the subjects score the level of frequency and confidence on a bar.

2.5 Research questions

This research is a pilot study, further investigating issues introduced in Kambakis-Vougiouklis (2012). More specifically it is investigated:

- (a) How frequently participants, of different cultural background, use language learning strategies and how confident they feel with each choice/how effective they consider each strategy.
- (b) How confident are they with each strategy, i.e. their CHESS evaluation? Do they avoid some because they do not know how to use it? We assumed that if they claim they use it rarely but on the other hand they score very high confidence-as it happened in many cases as we see- this might be interpreted as their wish to be taught how to use it. Similarly, if they claim they use a strategy often but they score low confidence, then it might again be interpreted as an appeal for further explanations, i.e. again instruction.
- (c) Are there any problematic areas in the questionnaire itself, like phrasing, wording, pragmatic/cultural information etc issues that again cannot be identified and clarified with quantitative analysis?.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

In the specific experiment forty eight students from the first three grades in a State Secondary school, in Thrace, Greece, were recruited through convenience sampling, twenty four Greek native speakers and twenty four Turkish native speakers with Greek as their second language. There were sixteen learners out of each grade, eight of low and eight of high level in English, four male, four female, forty eight learners altogether, twenty four male and twenty four female students.

3.2 Tools

We used the translated and validated 50-item Greek version of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning [21]. This version contains 50 items grouped into six categories measuring frequency of strategy use.

In the specific experiment, however, all 50 items must be identified with respect not only to frequency of use but also to Confidence Hypothesis about Effectiveness of Specific Strategy, i.e. the CHESS factor.

Finally, for filling in and processing of the result, we used the *Vougiouklis & Vougiouklis bar* instead of the Likert scales.

3.3 Procedure

The students read the questions on their computer screen, and were able to cut the bar accordingly, or even go back and change their initial score. There were 50 questions from the SILL questionnaire, having each question followed by a question checking the subject's confidence, overall 100 questions – bars to be answered - marked. The questions were read silently by each individual. If there was need for further explanation the students asked the researcher, and instant clarification was provided. The clarification could be heard by the rest of the students. Their answers could be saved only after all the questions had been answered. After saving their answers, the scoring was displayed in the form of numbers, starting from 0 to 6,2 depending on where the bar had been cut by each student.

4. Results - Analysis

To examine the effects of students' cultural background, gender, language proficiency in English a series of ANOVAs and MANOVAs with Sidac post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted using the GLM procedure in IBM Statistics SPSS v22.

The dependent variables that were the focal point of the investigation, were the eight memory strategies. However there were sixteen items overall: eight investigating frequency of use and eight investigating confidence that they enhanced L2 learning.

- I try to combine old with new knowledge in English
- I use the newly acquired English words in sentences to remember them
- I connect the sound of an English word with an image in order to remember it
- I use rhymes to remember the new English words
- I use flashcards to remember the new English words
- I act out the new English words
- I frequently revise
- I remember the new English words and phrases because I have seen them printed
- Confidence - I try to combine old with new knowledge in English
- Confidence - I use the new English words in sentences to remember them
- Confidence - I connect the sound of an English word with an image

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- Confidence - I use rhymes to remember the new English words
- Confidence - I use flashcards to remember the new English words
- Confidence - I act out the new English words
- Confidence - I frequently revise
- Confidence - I remember the new English words because I have seen them printed

The independent variables that were investigated were the students' cultural background in relation to their gender and language proficiency in English.

The data is still processed and it will be hopefully published in a future paper.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper was to introduce the new term, CHES, a convenient name for the parameter of confidence which is expected to affect both strategy use in learning but also many other aspects of life.

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